

THE UNRIVALLED FRIEND

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A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”
Proverbs 17:17.

THERE is one thing about the usefulness of which all men are agreed, namely, friendship. But most men are soon aware that counterfeits of friendship are common as autumn leaves; few men enjoy from others the highest and truest form of friendship; the friendships of this world are hollow, and they are as unsubstantial as a dream, as soon dissipated as a bubble, as light as thistledown. Those airy compliments, those empty sentences of praise, how glibly they fall from the lips; but how little have they to do with the heart! He must be a fool, indeed, who believes that there is anything in the complimentary affection but mere flattery or matter of form. The loving cup means not love, and the loud cheering of the toast means not sincere fellowship; with very many, friendship sits very loosely, they could almost write as Horace Walpole does in one of his letters; he says he takes everything very easily, “and if,” he says, “a friend should die, I drive down to the St. James's coffee house, and bring home another,” doubtless as cordial and enraptured with the new friend as with the old. Friends in this world are too often like the bees which swarm around the plants while they are covered with flowers, and those flowers contain nectar for their honey; but let November send its biting frosts, and the flowers are nipped and their friends, the bees, forsake them; swallow friendship lives out with us our summer, but finds other loves in winter. It has always been so from of old, even until now. Ahithophel has deserted David, and Judas has sold his Lord; the greatest of kings who have been fawned upon by their courtiers while in power, have been treated as if they were but dogs in the time of their extremity. We say, as the poet of the passions—

*“Sing Darius, great and good—
 Deserter in his utmost need,
 By those his former bounty fed.
 On the cold ground exposed he lies,
 With not a friend to close his eyes.”*

Of all friendship which is not based on principle, we may say with the prophet, “You are weighed in the balances, and found wanting.” But there *is* a higher friendship than this, by far, and it exists among Christians, among men of principle, among men of virtue where profession is not all, but where there is real meaning in the words they use. Damon and Pythias still have their followers among us; Jonathan and David are not without their imitators; all hearts are not traitorous; fidelity still lingers among men. Where godliness builds her house, true friendship finds a rest. Solomon, speaking not of the world's sham friends, but of friends indeed, says, “A friend loves at all times.” Having once given his heart to his chosen companion, he clings to him in all weathers, fair or foul; he loves him none the less because he becomes poor, or because his fame suffers an eclipse; his friendship, like a lamp, shines the brighter, or is made more manifest because of the darkness that surrounds it. True friendship is not fed from the barn floor, or the wine vat; it is not like the rainbow, dependent upon the sunshine; it is fixed as a rock, and firm as granite, and smiles superior to wind and tempest. If we have friendship at all, brothers and sisters, let this be the form it takes! Let us be willing to be brought to the test of the wise man, and being tried, may we not be found wanting. “A friend loves at all times.”

But I am not about to talk of friendship at all as it exists between man and man; I prefer to uplift the text into a still higher sphere. There is a Friend, blessed forever be His name, who loves at all times!

There is a brother who, in an emphatic sense, was born for adversity! That friend is Jesus, the friend of sinners; the friend of man; the brother of our souls, born into this world that He might succor us in our adversities. I shall take the text, then, and refer it to the Lord Jesus Christ; and unless time should fail us, I shall then refer it to ourselves as in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ, showing that we also ought to love Him even as He has loved us, always and under all adversities.

I. First, then, IN REFERENCE TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. The first sentence is, “*A friend loves at all times,*” and this leads us to consider, first, *the endurance of the love of Jesus Christ.*

My dear brothers and sisters, when we read “a friend loves at all times,” and refer that to Christ, the sentence, full as it is, falls short of what we mean, for our Lord Jesus is a friend who loved us before there *was any time!* Before time began the Lord Jesus Christ had entered into covenant that He would redeem a people unto Himself, who should show forth His Father’s praise. Before time began His prescient eyes had foreseen the creatures whom He determined to redeem by blood; these He took to Himself by election; these the Father also gave to Him by divine donation and upon these—as He saw them in the glass of the future—He set His heart. Long before days began to be counted, or moons to wax and wane, or suns to rise and set, Jehovah Jesus had set apart a people to Himself whom He espoused unto Himself; whose names He engraved upon His heart, and upon His hands, that they might be taken into union with Himself forever and ever! Meditate on that love which preceded the first rays of the morning, and went forth to you before the mountains were brought forth, or ever He had formed the earth and the world! My brothers and sisters, you believe the doctrine of eternal love; meditate, then, and let it be very sweet unto your hearts—

*“Before Your hands had made
The sun to rule the day,
Or earth’s foundation laid,
Or fashioned Adam’s clay,
What thoughts of peace and mercy flowed
In your dear bosom, O my God!”*

He loved you when time began, in the days before the flood, and in the far-off periods—for those promises which were spoken in His love had reference to you as well as to *all* the believing seed. All the deeds of love which were worked as a preface to His coming—all had some bearing towards you as one of His people. There never was a point in the antiquity of our world in which this friend did not love you! Every era of time has been a time of love. Love, like a silver thread, runs down the ages. Chiefly did He lay bare His love 1,800 years ago, when down with joyful haste He sped to lie in the manger, and hang as a baby at the virgin’s breast; He proved His love to you to a degree surpassing thought when, as a carpenter’s son He condescended for 30 years to live in obscurity, working out a perfect righteousness for you, and then spent three years of arduous toil, to be ended by a death of unutterable bitterness. You had no being then, but He loved you and gave Himself for you; for *you* the bloody sweat that fell amidst the olives of Gethsemane; for *you* the scourging, and the crowning with thorns; for *you* the nails and spear, the vinegar and lance; for *you* the cry of agony—the exceeding sorrow “even unto death.” He is a friend who loved you in that darkest and most doleful hour when your sins were laid upon Him, and with their crushing weight pressed Him down, as it were, in spirit, to the lowest hell.

Beloved, having thus redeemed you, He loved you when time began with you; as soon as you were born, the eyes of His tenderness were fixed upon you. “When Ephraim was a child, then I loved him.” It was loving-kindness which arranged your parents’ native place and time of birth. You came not into this world, as it were by chance, or as the young ostrich bereft of a parent’s care—the Lord was your Guardian. The Lord Jesus Christ looked upon you in your cradle, and bade His angels keep watch around you; He would not let you die unconverted, though fierce diseases waited around you to hurry you to hell; and when you grew up to manhood, and ripened the follies of youth into the crimes of mature years, yet He still loved you! O let your heart be humbled as you remember that if you ever fell into blasphemy, He loved you as you cursed Him; that if you indulged in Sabbath-breaking, He loved you when you despised His day; that your neglected Bible could not wean His heart from you; that your neglected prayer

closet could not make Him cease His affection! Alas, to what an excess of riot did some of His people run! But He loved them notwithstanding all; He was a friend who loved under the most provoking circumstances—

***“Loved when a wretch defiled with sin,
At war with heaven, in league with hell,
A slave to every lust obscene,
Who, living, lived but to rebel.”***

When justice would have said, “Let the rebel go, O Jesus; be not bound any longer by cords of love to such a wretch,” our ever faithful Redeemer would not cast us away, but threw another band of divine grace around us, and loved us still. Consider well, “His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins.”

I feel as if this were rather a matter for you to think over in private, than for me thus hastily to introduce to you in public. May the Holy Spirit, however, now bedew your hearts with grateful drops of celestial love as I remind you of the love at all times of this best of friends. You remember when you were compelled to seek Him, when your heart began to be weary of its sin, and to be alarmed at the doom that would surely follow unpardonable transgression? It was His love that sowed the first seeds of desire and anxiety in your heart! You had never desired Him if He had not first desired you! There was never a good thought towards Christ in any human breast unless Christ first put it there! He drew you, and then you began to run after Him; but had He left you alone, your running would have been *from* Him, and never towards Him. It was a bitter time when we were seeking the Savior, a time of anguish, and sore travail; we recollect the tears and prayers that we poured out day and night, asking for mercy. Jesus, our friend, was loving to us then, taking delight in those penitential tears, putting them into His bottle, telling the angels that we were praying, and making them string their harps afresh to sweet notes of praise over sinners who repented. He knew us, knew us in the gloom, in the thick darkness in which we sought after God, if haply we might find Him; He was near the prodigal’s side when in all his rags and filth he was saying, “I will arise and go to my Father,” and it was Jesus through whom we were introduced to the Father’s bosom, and received the parental kiss, and were made to sit down where there was music and dancing, because the dead are alive, and the lost are found!

My brothers and sisters, since that happy day, this friend has loved us at all times! I wish I could say that since that sacred hour when we first came to His feet, and saw ourselves saved through Him, we had always walked worthily of the privileges we have received, but it has been very much the reverse. There have been times in which we have honored Him, His grace has abounded, and our holiness has been manifest; but alas, there have been other seasons in which we have backslidden, our hearts have grown cold, and we were on the road to become like Nabal, when his heart was turned to a stone within him. We have been half persuaded, like Orpah, to go back to the land of idols, and not like Ruth, to cleave unto the Lord our God. Our heart has played the harlot from the love of Christ, desiring the leeks, and garlic, and onions of Egypt rather than the treasures of the land of promise, but at such times when our piety has been at a low ebb, He has loved us still! There has not been the slightest diminution in the affection of Christ even when our piety has been diminished; He does not set His clock by our watch, or stint His love to the narrow measure of ours; I fear we have often gone further than merely getting poor in grace within—there have been times when God’s people have even actually fallen into overt sin! Yes, and have descended to sin grievously, too, and to dishonor the name of Christ; but herein is mercy, even those actual and accursed sins of ours have not torn away the promise from us, nor turned away the heart of Christ for His beloved. Sinned though we have, to our abounding sorrow—I was about to say, for if there could be sorrow in heaven, we might eternally regret that we have sinned against such love and mercy—yet for all that, our Lord and Savior would not cast us off; nor will He renounce us, come what may.

Reflect, my dear friends, upon all the trying, and changeful scenes through which you have passed since the time of your conversion. You have been rich, perhaps, and increased in goods—you were

tempted to forget your Lord, but He was a friend who loved you at all times, and He would not allow your prosperity to ruin you—He still made His love to dart with healing beams into your soul! But you have also been very poor. The cupboard has been bare, and you have said, “Where shall I find money to supply my needs?” But Christ has not gone away because your suit was threadbare, or your house ill furnished; no, He has been nearer than ever, and if He revealed Himself to you in your prosperity, much more in your adversity. You have found Him a faithful friend when all others were unfaithful; true when everyone else was a liar. You have been sorely sick, sometimes, but He it was who made the pillow, and softened the bed of your affliction; it may be you have been slandered, and those who loved you have passed you by; some ill word has been spoken in which there was no truth, but it has sufficed to turn away the esteem of many, but your Lord has gone with you through shame and abuse, and never, for a single moment, has He even *hinted* that He only loved you because you were held in respect by men. Ever faithful, ever true has been this friend who loves at all times. Ah, there have been times, it may be with you, when you could gladly have thrown your very self away, for you felt so empty, so good-for-nothing, so undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving; you felt more fit to die than to live; you could hardly entertain a hope that any good thing could ever spring from you; but when you have least esteemed yourself, His esteem of you has been just the same; when you were ready to die in a ditch, He has been ready to lift you to a throne; when you felt yourself a castaway, you have still been pressed to His dear bosom, an object of His peculiar regard.

Soon, very soon, your time will come to die. You shall pass through the valley of death shade, but you need not fear, for the friend who loves at all times will be with you! That eminent servant of God, Jonathan Edwards, when he was at his last, said, “Where is Jesus of Nazareth, my old and faithful friend? I know He will be with me now that I need His help,” and so He was, for that faithful servant died triumphantly! You shall inquire in that last day for Jesus of Nazareth, and you shall hear Him say, “Here I am!” You shall find the death shade vale lit up with supernal splendor—it shall be no death to you, but a passing into eternal life because He who is the resurrection and the life shall be your helper!

Thus I have hastily run through the life of Christ’s love from the beginning that had no beginning, down to the end that knows no end—and in every case we see that He is a friend who loves at all times.

Now, brothers and sisters, I shall vary the strain, though still keeping to the same subject. Let us consider *the reality of Christ’s love* at all times. The text says, “A friend loves at all times,” not *professes* to love, not *talks* of love, but *really* does so. Now in Christ’s case, the love has become intensely practical; His love has *never* been a thing of mere words or pretensions; His love has acted out itself in mighty deeds, and signs, and wonders worthy of a God such as heaven itself shall not sufficiently extol with all its golden harps.

See then, brothers and sisters, Christ has practically loved us at all times! It is not long ago that you and I were slaves to sin; we wore the fetters, nor could we break them from our wrists; we were held fast by evil passions, and worldly habits, and there seemed no hope of liberty for us. Jesus loved us at all times, but the love did not let us remain prisoners any longer, for He came and paid the ransom price for us! In drops of blood from His own heart, He counted down the price of our redemption, and by His eternal Spirit He broke every fetter from us, and today His believing people rejoice in the liberty where-with Christ makes them free. See how practical His love was! He did not leave the slave in his chains, and let him remain a captive, but He loved us right out of our prison into a sacred freedom! Our Lord found us not long ago standing at our trial; there we were prisoners at the bar; we had nothing to plead in our defense. The accuser stood up to plead against us, and as he laid many charges and heavy, we were not able to answer so much as one of them. Our great High Priest stood there, and saw us thus arraigned as prisoners at the bar; He loved us, and oh, how efficient was His love—He became an advocate for us—He did more; He stood in our place, stood where the felon ought to stand. He suffered what was due to us, and then, covering us with His perfect righteousness, He said before the blaze of the ineffable throne of justice, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is Christ who died, yes, rather has risen again.” He did not love the prisoner at the bar, and leave him there to be condemned; He loved

him until as this day we stand acquitted, and there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Believer, lift up your heart now, and bless His name who has done all this for you!

Our Lord, when He came in mercy to us, found us in the rags of our self-righteousness, and in the abject poverty of our natural condition; we were houseless, fatherless; we were without spiritual bread; we were sick and sore, we were as low and degraded as sin could make us. He loved us, but He did not leave us where His love found us. Ah, do you not remember how He washed us in the fountain which flowed from His veins; how He wrapped us about with the fair white linen which is the righteousness of His saints; how He gave us bread to eat that the world knows not of; how He supplied all our needs, and gave us a promise that whatever we should ask in prayer, if we did but believe His name, we should receive it? We were aliens, but His love has made us citizens! We were far off, but His love has brought us near! We were perishing, but His love has enriched us! We were serfs, but His love has made us sons! We were condemned criminals, but His love has made us "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ."

I shall not enlarge here, but I shall appeal to the experience of every believer. In your needs, has not Christ always helped you? You have been in doubt which way to take, and you have gone to Him for guidance—did ever you go wrong when you left it to Him? Your heart has been very heavy and you had no friend that you could communicate with, but you have talked with Him, and have you not always found solace in pouring out your heart before Him? When did He ever fail you? When did you find His arm shortened, or His ear heavy? Up to this moment has it been mere talk with Christ? No, you know it has been most true and real love—and now in the recollection of it, I beseech you give Him true and real praise, not that of the head only, or of the lips, but of your whole spirit, soul, and body as you consecrate yourself afresh to Him. See then, brothers and sisters the great endurance of Christ's love, and see then also, the reality of it.

By your patience I shall notice in the next place, *the nature of the love of Christ*, accounting for its endurance and reality. The love of our good friend to us sprang from the purest possible motives; He has nothing to gain by loving us. Some friendship may be supposed to be tinged with a desire of self-advantage, to which extent it is degraded and valueless; but Jesus Christ had nothing to gain, and everything to lose. "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor." The love He bears to His people was not a love which sprang from anything in *them*; I have no doubt it had a reason, for Christ never acts unreasonably, but that reason did not lie in *us*! Love between us and our fellows sometimes springs from personal beauty, sometimes for traits of character which we admire, and at other times from obligations which we have incurred, but with Christ none of these things could avail. There was no personal beauty in any one of His elect; there were no traits of character in them that could enchant Him; there was very much, on the other hand, that might have *disgusted* Him, and He certainly was under no obligations to us, for we had not a being then, when His heart was set upon us! The love of man to man is sustained by something drawn from the object of love, but the love of Christ to us has its deep springs within Himself. As His own courts maintain the grandeur of His throne without drawing a revenue from the creatures, so His own love maintains itself without drawing any motives and reasons from us, and therefore, my brothers and sisters, you see why this love is the same at all times. If it had to subsist upon *us*, and what we do, and what we merit, ah, it would always be at the lowest conceivable ebb! But since it leaps up from the great deep of the divine heart, it never changes, and by His grace, it never shall!

Be it also remembered that Christ's love was a wise love, not blind as ours often is; He loved us knowing exactly what we were whom He loved; there is nothing in the constitution of man that Jesus Christ had not perceived; there is nothing in your individuality but what Christ had foreknown. Remember, Christ loved His people *before* they began to sin, but not in the dark; He knew *exactly* everything they would think, or do, or be—and if He resolved to love them at all, you may rest assured He never will change in that love, since nothing fresh can ever occur to His divine mind. Had He begun to love us, and we had deceived and disappointed Him, He might have turned us out of doors, but He knew right

well that we would revolt, that we would backslide, and provoke Him to jealousy. He loved us knowing all this, and therefore it is that His love abides and endures, and shall even remain faithful to the end.

Brothers and sisters, the love of Christ is associated continually with an Infinite degree of patience and pity. Our Lord knows that we are but dust, and like as a father pities his children, so He pities us; we are but short-tempered, but our Lord is long-suffering. When He sees us sin, He says within Himself, “Alas, poor souls, what folly in them thus to injure themselves.” He takes not our cold words in umbrage, so as to put Himself in wrathful fume with it, but He says, “Poor child, how he hurts himself by this, and how much he loses thereby.” He even has a kind look for us when we sin, for He knows it is blotted out through His own blood, and He sees rather, the mischief which it is quite sure to bring to the poor soul, than the evil of the sin itself. Jesus has infinite condescension and patience, and we cannot so provoke Him as to turn Him from His purpose of divine grace. He is at all times ready to pardon, and never slow to be moved to forgiveness. Oh, the provocations of men, but the patience of Christ reaches over the mountains of our provocation, and drowns them all.

I think one reason why Christ is so constant in His love, and so patient with us is that He sees us as what we are *to be*. He does not look at us merely as what we are *today* in Adam’s fall—ruined and lost, nor as we are today, but partly delivered from indwelling sin, but He remembers that we are to lie in His bosom forever; that we are to be exactly like He is, and to be partakers of His glory; and as He sees us in the glass of the future, as by-and-by to be His companions in the world of the perfect, He passes by transgression, iniquity, and sin, and like a true friend, He loves us at all times.

I shall not weary those who know this love; they need no gaudy sentences or eloquent periods to set it forth; its sweetness lies in itself. You may drink such wine as this out of any cup; he who knows the flavor of this divine dainty asks not that it be carved this way or that—he rejoices but to have it, for the meditation upon it must be sweet. “A friend loves at all times.”

The next part of the sentence of the text is, “*and a brother is born for adversity*.” That is to say, a true brother comes out and shows his brotherhood in the time of the trouble of the family. Now let every believer in Jesus here catch the meaning of this with regard to Christ. Jesus Christ was born *for you*. “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.” But if at any time more than another Christ is peculiarly yours by birth, it is in the time of *adversity*; a brother born for adversity.

Observe that Christ was born in the first place, for our adversity; to deliver us from the great adversity of the fall. When our parents’ sin had blasted Eden, and destroyed our hopes; when the summer of our joy had turned into the winter of our discontent, then Christ was born in Bethlehem’s manger, that the race might be lifted up to hope, and His elect be elevated to salvation. He restored that which He took not away; He rebuilt that which He cast not down. He had never come to be a Savior if we had not been lost. Because our adversity was so great—therefore so great a Savior was required, and so great a Savior came!

Our Lord is born for adversity because He has the peculiar art of sympathizing with all in adversity. No other but He can claim that He has ranged high and low through all the territories of grief; only this Jesus Christ can justly make that claim. Every pang that ever rends a human heart has first tried its keen edge on *Him*. It is not possible, even in the extremities of anguish to which some are exposed, that any man can go beyond Christ in the endurance of pain. Christ is crowned king of misery; He is the emperor of the domains of woe; He is able, therefore, to succor all such as are tempted and tried, seeing He is compassed about Himself with a feeling of our infirmities. Look to him suffering on the tree; look to Him throughout all His life of shame and pain, and you will see that He was born into adversity—and through being born into it, was born to sympathize with our trials, having learned, as the Captain of our salvation, to be made perfect in sympathy with those many sons whom He brings to glory.

Brothers and sisters, the text means more than this, however. Jesus Christ is a brother born for adversity because He always gives His choicest presence to His saints when they are in tribulation. I know many men will think that the presence of Christ with the sick and with the depressed is mere fancy. Ah, blessed fancy! Such a fancy as makes them laugh at pain, and rejoice in deep distress, and take joyfully

the spoiling of their goods. Truly a blessed fancy! Let me declare my heart's witness, and assert that if there is anything real anywhere to the spiritual mind, the presence of Christ is intensely so. Though we do not see His form bending over us, nor mark the lovely light of those eyes that once were red with weeping; though we touch not that hand which felt the nails, and hear no soft footfalls of the feet that were fastened to the cross, yet are we *inwardly* as certainly conscious of the shadow of Christ falling upon us as ever were His disciples when He stood in the tempest-tossed vessel, and said to winds and waves, "Peace, be still." Believe me, it is not imagination, nor is it barely faith; it *is* faith that brings Him, but there is a kind of spiritual sense that discovers His presence, and that rejoices in the bliss flowing from it. We speak what we know, and testify what we have seen when we say that He is a brother born for adversity in very deed, most tenderly revealing Himself to His people as He does not unto the world.

He is born for adversity, I think, in this sense, that you can hardly know Him except through adversity. You may know Christ so as to be saved by Him by a single act of faith, but for a full discovery of His beauty, it needs that you go through the furnace. Those children of God whose grassy paths are always newly mown and freshly smoothed, learn comparatively but little fellowship with Christ, and have but slender knowledge of Him. But they who do business on great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep, and these know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," many can say, not only because of the restoring effect of sorrow, but because their afflictions have acted like windows to let them gaze into the very heart of Christ, and read His pity, and understand His nature as they never could have done by other means. Furnace light is memorably clear! Jesus is a brother born for adversity because in the glimmer of the world's eventide, when all the lamps are going out, a glory shines around Him transforming midnight into day.

He is a brother born for adversity, in the last place because in adversity it is that through His people's patience He is glorified. I guarantee you the sweetest songs that ever come up from these lowlands to the eternal throne are from sick beds. "They shall sing His high praises in the fires." God's children are too often dumb when they have much of this world's earth in their mouths; but when the Lord is pleased to take away their comforts and possessions then, like birds in cages, they begin to sing with all their hearts! Praise Him, you suffering ones, your praise will be grateful to Him! Extol Him, you mourners—exchange by faith your sorrows for hopes, and bless His name who deserves to be praised!

II. Now, I shall leave this, and only for a moment turn the text round to a practical purpose by **REFERRING IT TO THE CHRISTIAN.**

I hope that what has been spoken has been only the echo of the experience of the most of you. You have found Jesus Christ to be a true brother and a blessed friend; now let the same be true of you; he that would have friends must show himself friendly. If Christ is such a friend to us, what manner of people ought we to be towards Him? So, beloved, let us pray and labor to be friends who love Christ at all times. Alas, some professors seem to love Him at no time at all! They give Him lip homage, but they refuse to give Him the exercise of their talents, or the contribution of their substance; they love Him only with words that are but air; they offer Him no sweet cane with money, neither do they fill Him with the fat of their sacrifices; such people are windbag lovers, and do nothing substantial to prove their affection. Let it not be so with us! Let our love to Christ be so true as to compel us to make sacrifices for Him; let us deny ourselves that we may spread abroad the knowledge of His truth, and never be content unless in very deed and act we are giving proofs of our love.

We ought to love Him at all times. Alas, there are *some* that prosper in business who grow too great to love their Savior. They hold their heads too high to associate with His saints. Before their wealth they were with His people—content to worship with them when they were in humble circumstances; but they have prospered in trade, they have laid by a good store of wealth, and now they feel half ashamed to attend the conventicle that was once the very joy of their hearts! They must seek out the *world's* religion, and they must worship after the *world's* fashion, for they must not be left behind in *society*! The people of God are not good enough for them, though they are kings and princes in Christ's esteem, yet are they

too poor company for those who have risen so high in the world. Alas, alas, that professed lovers of Jesus should rise too high to walk truthfully and faithfully with Christ! It is no rise at all, but a lamentable fall! Let us cling to Him in days of joy as well as nights of grief, and prove to all mankind that there are no enchantments in this world that can win our hearts away from our best-beloved.

We should love Jesus Christ at all times, that is to say, in times when the church seems dull and dead. Perhaps some of you are living in a district just now where the ministry is painfully devoid of power; the lamp burns very low in your sanctuary; the members worshipping are few, and zeal is altogether dead. Do not desert the church; do not flee away from her in the time of her need; keep to your post come what may! Be the last man to leave the sinking vessel, if sink she must; resolve as a friend of Christ to love Him at all times! And as a brother born into that church, feel that now, beyond all other times, in the season of adversity, you must adhere to her.

It may happen that some here present may tomorrow be found in a workshop, or in some other place where their business brings them, where some dear child of God will be laughed at and ridiculed; that same man you would have cheerfully claimed on the Sabbath as your brother; you delighted to unite your voice with him in prayer, but now, while he stands in the midst of a ribald throng, will you claim him, or rather, claim Christ in him? They are making cruel jokes; they are vexing his gracious spirit! Now, it is possible that a cowardly fear may make you slink away to the other end of the shop, but, oh, if you remember that a friend loves at all times, you will take up this man's quarrel as being Christ's quarrel, and you, as being a part of the body of Christ, will be willing to share whatever contempt may come upon your fellow Christian, and you will say, "If you mock him, you may also mock me, for I also have been with Jesus of Nazareth, and Him whom you really scoff, I adore." O let us never, by the love that Christ has borne to us, keep back a truth of God because it may expose us to shame! Let us never be such cowards as to compromise the word of God because we may then live in silken ease and delicacy. These are not times in which one single particle of truth ought to be repressed; whatever the Spirit of God, and the word of God may have taught you, my brothers and sisters, out with it for Christ's sake, and let it bring what it will to you, but bear it with joy! Since your Savior bore far more for you, count it joy to bear *anything* for Him! Be a brother born on purpose for adversity! Do you expect to be carried to heaven on a bed of ease? Do you reckon to win the everlasting laurels without a conflict? What? Sirs, would you stand beneath the waving banners of victory without having first endured the smoke and the dust of battle? No, rather with consecrated courage follow in the steps of your Master! Love Him at all times! Give up all for Him, and then shall you soon be with Him in His glory world without end! God grant a blessing for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PROVERBS 17.

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